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It's Finally Official – Squaw Bay Renamed Mawikwe Bay

NPS worked with tribal, state, and local governments to replace offensive name

The U.S. Board on Geographic Names (BGN) approved an NPS proposal Monday requesting a name change for northern Bayfield County's Squaw Bay, located a few miles east of Cornucopia at the western end of Apostle Islands National Lakeshore's mainland unit. The National Park Service has been working with tribal, state, and local officials since 2000 to rename it Mawikwe (pronounced Mah' wee kway) Bay, in order to avoid having to use a racially derogatory term when referring to the area's increasingly- popular sea caves. Mawikwe is the Ojibwe term for "weeping woman."

"We are tremendously relieved that this issue has at last been resolved," said Apostle Islands National Lakeshore superintendent Bob Krumenaker. "The process took much longer than we would have liked, and we had to find new ways to describe the sea cave area that avoided using either the old name or the proposed name. We've been thinking of the place as Mawikwe Bay for seven years now, so it is nice to be able to finally refer to it officially with that name."

Since the 1890's the U.S. Board on Geographic names has been striving to bring consistency to the federal government's use of place names in order to reduce confusion. Federal agencies are required to use only Board- approved names in their publications. There is a formal process that must be followed to change the name of a geographic place.

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After hearing from Red Cliff tribal members who considered the term vulgar and derogatory, park officials initiated that formal process. The required application was prepared, and in the winter of 2000 Bayfield County, the Town of Bayfield, and the Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa all passed resolutions that firmly stood behind the NPS proposal. The first major hurdle was cleared in the spring of 2000 when the state of Wisconsin's Geographic Names Council voted to approve the name change.

After the state board approved the name change, the process – a fast- moving one up until that time - slowed to a crawl. Park officials inquired on an annual basis to find out where things stood, but no one ever seemed to know. The apparent logjam cleared this spring, and recently the Bad River band was contacted by the BGN to find out what they thought of the proposal.

“In hindsight, we should have done that ourselves back in 2000,” said Krumenaker.

When Bad River officials indicated recently that they had no objections to the proposal, the matter was finally put to a vote at a meeting of the BGN held on Monday, June 11, and the proposal was approved.

“It actually wasn't all that difficult to clear this final hurdle,” said Krumenaker. “But for whatever reason, it sure was difficult getting to it.”

In his book *LaPointe, Village Outpost*, historian Hamilton Nelson Ross claimed that the bay was originally referred to as Ganitagekweiag, or “Mourning Squaw Bay.” Although it is almost certainly not the original Ojibwe name for the bay, Mawikwe (or weeping woman) Bay was chosen because it is faithful to the original concept, is historically appropriate, easily pronounceable, and honors the park's Ojibwe neighbors.

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